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FRIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Secretary-General, concluding official visit to the Netherlands, attends working session of International War Crimes Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia; appoints Theodore van Boven, a Dutch national, as Tribunal's Acting Registrar.

+ General Assembly encourages Member States to respond positively to Secretary-General's request for observers to monitor April elections in South Africa; urges parties there to adhere to democratic principles and to take part in elections.

+ Baltic States say Russian Foreign Minister's statement about keeping military forces in their territory challenges their sovereignty and conflicts with Russian Federation's international obligations.

+ Islamic shariah laws must evolve to meet women's needs, experts tell Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women; laws granting equality should be interpreted properly.

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Concluding his stay in the Netherlands, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today visited the Permanent Court of Arbitration and attended a working session of the International War Crimes Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, according to a United Nations spokesman. Discussions there focused on the substantive work of the Tribunal, and on the administrative and budgetary aspects of its establishment. The Secretary-General appointed Theodore van Boven of the Netherlands as the Tribunal's Acting Registrar.

The spokesman confirmed that the Secretary-General had met with the Foreign Minister of Libya in Geneva last weekend. The Secretary-General had urged the Libyan Government to make a positive move towards the implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions. The Foreign Minister had reiterated his Government's position as expressed in a letter to the Secretary-General dated 28 December. In that letter, Libya called on him to prevail upon the Governments of France, the United Kingdom and the United States to settle the confrontation regarding the bombings of Pan Am flight 103 and UTA flight 772.

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The General Assembly today encouraged Member States to respond positively to the Secretary-General's request for observers to monitor the elections in South Africa next April. It also welcomed his intention to set up a special trust fund to finance the participation of additional observers from African and other developing countries and urged States to contribute generously to it. The Assembly took that action by adopting, without a vote, a resolution introduced by Ibrahim Gambari (Nigeria), Chairman of the Special Committee against Apartheid.

The Assembly urged all parties in South Africa, including those which did not participate fully in the multi-party talks, to respect agreements reached during the negotiations, to adhere to democratic principles, and to take part in the elections. It called on all parties to promote the full participation of all South Africans in the democratic process by exercising restraint and refraining from acts of violence and intimidation. The Assembly also called on the South African authorities to protect the rights of all South Africans to organize and participate in peaceful public manifestations and rallies, to run for election and to participate in the polls in all parts of the country, including the so-called "homelands", free of intimidation.

Also today, the Assembly extended its sympathy to the Government and people of the United States for the tragic loss of life and material damage resulting from the recent earthquake in California.

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The recent policy statement by Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev regarding the possible maintainance of a military presence in the Baltic States conflicts with the Russian Federation's international obligations, according to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. On 18 January, Mr. Kozyrev said a Russian withdrawal could cause a "security vacuum" which might be filled by hostile forces. the three States said in a letter to the Secretary-General dated 19 January. They stressed that the Russian Federation was obliged by several United Nations, North Atlantic Cooperation Council and Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) documents to withdraw its forces promptly, completely and unconditionally.

The Foreign Minister's statement was "aimed directly against the sovereignty of the Baltic States", the letter stated. It also undermined the "Partnership for Peace" plan accepted at the recent North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Summit in Brussels and the creation of a new European security structure, the letter stated. In that context, the Russian military presence in the Baltic States became an even more destabilizing factor in the region.

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The Islamic shariah laws must evolve with the times in order to suit the needs of modern women, experts of the Committee on the Elimination of

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Discrimination against Women said today as they heard Libya's response to their comments on its initial report. Stressing that the shariah laws granted full equality to women, the experts from Bangladesh, Egypt and Tunisia called on Muslim countries to interpret them properly so as not to derogate from women's rights. The shariah laws were not immutable and must be adapted within the context of the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, they said.

Stressing the equality inherent in the shariah laws, the Libyan representative described the legal equality enjoyed by women in his country. There was no discrimination in the punishment of adultery whether committed by men or women. Libyan legislation favoured monogamy, with certain restrictions imposed on second marriages, and polygamy was the exception to the rule.

The Committee, which is currently holding its thirteenth session at Headquarters, is discussing the measures taken by 13 States parties to the 1979 Convention to ensure equal participation by women in political, economic and cultural life. States parties are required to submit an initial report within one year of accession to the Convention and periodic reports at least every four years.

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